

The Ultimatum

Although most DEA agents won't admit it, they work in a pressure cooker. And one reason they probably won't admit it is because they don't really know it. They get so used to the abnormality of their life that it becomes normal. They live in a clear plastic bubble which strangers can look into but can not enter and in many cases would not want to.

Each agent deals with the anomalous and highly irregular way of life differently. But the common bond between all agents is that the "job" makes for a difficult at best family life. And when the pressures at home compete with the pressures at work, a formula for disaster is created. Some agents cope while others turn to the relief given by a bottle. And up until recent years, alcoholism was by and large ignored, swept under a rug in a futile attempt to deny its existence.

One such alcoholic was Steve M., a lovable Irishman who New York management shuffled from group to group in the late 1970's. A competent worker when sober, Steve was a disaster when he drank which was more times than not. And on one occasion Steve went on a legendary "bender" which eventually led to an ultimatum, "clean up your act or get out."

When the night Duty Agent at the base station (radio room) picked up the telephone, he was advised by a Task Force Detective that he had detained a suspicious person in the parking garage where he obviously had no right to be. Rushing to the large four story garage down the block from the 57th Street office, the Duty Agent quickly got the picture.

"Agent Steve left me in the car," the hispanic intruder explained. "He told me to wait for him while he went to get a cup of coffee." Which translated to mean that Steve M. had left the informant in his G-Car while he went to have a few quick drinks. Which further translated to mean that Steve M. had been drinking all day and wanted to continue.

Steve had been out with his group on a "deal" and when the "transaction" had been consummated, he was told by his boss to bring the informant back to the office and wait for his arrival. But when the group was late getting back, Steve went to pass some time at a nearby pub. Wishing that the situation would go away like a bad smell, the Duty Agent asked the conscious detective to take the informant to the office while he looked for "Agent Steve."

However the resourceful "Agent Steve" was no where to be found so the Duty Agent disabled his G-Car by removing the distributor cap and placing it in the back seat. And when Steve finally arrived at the base station hours later and in a state of obvious intoxication to complain that his car wouldn't start, the concerned Duty Agent convinced him to get a few hours sleep in the sleep over room next to the gym. "I'll wake you at eight o'clock tomorrow morning before I leave," the Duty Agent promised while "tucking" Steve in for the night. To document what had happened in the duty log as required by office policy would only have gotten Steve in more trouble with the "suits" up front, so the Duty Agent just made believe that it didn't happen like every body else did when it came to Steve's drinking.

But when the Duty Agent went to wake Steve up the next morning, he was gone. And when he checked the garage for the disabled G-Car, that was gone too. Steve must have sobered up, fixed his G-Car, and went home, the relieved Duty Officer convinced himself.

However when Steve's boss called the Duty Agent at home a few hours later and advised that Steve's wife had called the office looking for him, the agent knew that Steve had somehow screwed up again. Steve had wrecked so many government cars that his fellow agents humorously nick-named him "Crash" and the possibility that Steve had injured himself and others on the way home existed. Checks with State and local authorities showed that that was not the case yet.

When Special Agent Eddie Magnuson started to look into the narcotic's activity of a gang of young Italian thugs called the "Swat Team," he did not have the foggiest idea where the

When DEA New York Violent Crime Task Force Detective Bill Doheny showed up at the office for an unexpected "controlled delivery" on a hot Sunday afternoon in August 1994, he had a